

Sen. Smith Decries Lack of Student Voices at Free Speech Hearing

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Friday, 21 April 2023 10:44 -



Legislative "free speech" hearing at UW-Eau Claire held by invitation only locks out student voices.

EAU CLAIRE – The Wisconsin State Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities held an invitation-only informational hearing at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Thursday morning on the UW System’s recent free speech survey.

According to the meeting announcement, the discussion was to focus on “how the lack of free speech and intellectual diversity affects the quality of [public] education.” The free speech committee hearing was closed to public comment, hearing only from invited speakers.

Senator Jeff Smith (D-Brunswick) reacted with the following statement:



“Having speakers by invitation only for a free speech hearing says all you need to know about the committee’s intentions,” Senator Smith said. “Students are the individuals most directly impacted by free speech rights at UW institutions. Hearing their voices should be a priority in addressing obstacles to free speech on campus.”

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“Legislators should use their platform and authority to elevate the voices of students, not prioritize their own agendas. Rather than wasting time manufacturing a crisis, let’s deal with the crises students are asking us for help with – like funding for the UW System, mental health access and student aid.

“I’m proud of the steps UW-Eau Claire, UW-River Falls and other UW System schools have taken to foster free expression. Students deserve a direct say when it comes to the issues that matter to them, and I’m committed to lifting up and amplifying students’ voices across the UW System.”

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The 31st Senate District includes all of Buffalo, Pepin and Trempealeau counties and portions of Pierce, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson and St. Croix counties.